

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 /083 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8060
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SF
SUBJECT: THE 1977 SESSION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING IS THE SUMMARY OF AN EMBASSY AIRGRAM ASSESSING THE RESULTS OF THE 1977 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION. IN BRIEF, LITTLE PROGRESS WAS MADE IN DEALING WITH THE COUNTRY'S BASIC PROBLEMS OF APARTHEID AND POWER SHARING. THE FEW RELATIVELY MINOR VERLIGTE ("LIBERAL") MEASURES PASSED WERE OVERSHADOWED BY SIGNIFICANT REINFORCEMENT OF APARTHEID AND ITS DEFENSES. THE SESSION UNDERSCORED THE BASIC REALITY THAT PARLIAMENT, WHILE PROVIDING A FORUM FOR OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF OFFICIAL POLICY, FUNCTIONS AS A RUBBER STAMP FOR WHAT THE NATIONAL PARTY DECIDES TO DO. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY SESSION WHICH ENDED JUNE 24 ELABORATED FURTHER ON THE NATIONAL PARTY (NP) POLICY OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT. WITH A FEW NOTEWORTHY EXCEPTIONS, THE NP LEADERSHIP MAINTAINED ITS BASICALLY HARD-LINE AND UNCOMPROMISING POSITION, DESPITE THE WARNINGS INHERENT IN SOWETO AND ITS AFTERMATH AND MOUNTING INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE. MAJOR POLICY STATEMENTS, PRINCIPALLY BY PRIME MINISTER

VORSTER, PROVIDED NO INDICATION OF A CHANGE IN DIRECTION AND SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT WAS REINFORCED THROUGH LEGISLATION. ALTHOUGH PARLIAMENT PASSED A NUMBER OF RELATIVELY MINOR VERLIGTE MEASURES WHICH WILL RESULT IN SOME IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LIVES OF NON-WHITES, A TIGHTENING UP IN THE FIELDS OF SECURITY AND DEFENSE, AND MORE RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION CONCERNING CENSORSHIP, SQUATTERS AND PASS LAWS OVERSHADOWED THE FEW POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS. SOME OF THE MAJOR ACTIONS WHICH THE SAG PORTRAYED AS GIANT STEPS FORWARD, INCLUDING BOPHUTHATSWANA INDEPENDENCE, ACCEPTANCE OF PORTIONS OF THE THERON COMMISSION REPORT, AND THE COMMUNITY COUNCILS BILL DESIGNED TO GIVE URBAN BLACKS A MEASURE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT IN TOWNSHIPS ARE AT BEST AMBIGUOUS AND IN SOME CASES ACTUALLY RETROGRESSIVE.

3. IN THE FIELD OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE MOST IMPORTANT MEASURE ADOPTED WAS THE SOUTH WEST AFRICA CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL WHICH WAS INTENDED TO HELP PAVE THE WAY FOR THE EVENTUAL INDEPENDENCE OF THAT TERRITORY.

4. IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD, THE BUDGET REFLECTED CONTINUED TIGHT FISCAL AND MONETARY POLICIES, WITH PRIORITY ON LIMITED INFLATION AND THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS DEFICIT RATHER THAN FACILITIES FOR NON-WHITES, UNEMPLOYMENT, OR REVITALIZING A SAGGING ECONOMY. THE BUDGET DID CONTAIN A 32 PERCENT INCREASE IN FUNDS FOR BLACK EDUCATION WHICH WILL FINANCE THE FREE DISTRIBUTION OF TEXTBOOKS. DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ROSE 21

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PERCENT, COMPARED TO 40 PERCENT LAST YEAR AND NOW ACCOUNT FOR 19 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL BUDGET.

5. FROM AN INTERNAL POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE, THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION WAS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST FOR HAVING BROUGHT DIVISIONS WITHIN THE NP MORE INTO THE OPEN AND STIMULATING DISCUSSIONS ON THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY. NEVERTHELESS, THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE FRAGMENTED OPPOSITION AND THE GOVERNMENT'S DISINCLINATION TO DEBATE ISSUES AND RELY INSTEAD ON USE OF ITS AUTOMATIC TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY LIMITS THE USEFULNESS OF THE PARLIAMENT AS A FORUM FOR AIRING NATIONAL PROBLEMS. SOME MEMBERS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE HOUSE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED DISCOURAGEMENT AT HOW LITTLE INPUT INTO POLICY THEY REALLY HAVE IN WHAT THEY INCREASINGLY SEE AS LITTLE MORE THAN A RUBBER-STAMP INSTITUTION. THE "MAJOR ADVANCES" OF RECENT MONTHS --E.G., MORE FLEXIBLE SPORTS POLICY, SOME PROMISED IMPROVEMENTS IN BLACK EDUCATION, RELAXING OF APARTHEID IN POST OFFICES, AND LEASEHOLDS IN URBAN TOWNSHIPS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ABOUT BY ADMINISTRATIVE RATHER THAN PARLIAMENTARY ACTION.

6. OVER THE COMING MONTHS, THE MOST IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES MAY WELL BE CONSTITUTIONAL ONES, WHICH THE

PARLIAMENT WILL NECESSARILY HAVE TO ENDORSE. THE NATIONAL PARTY LEADERSHIP THROUGH A CABINET COMMITTEE STUDYING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE PRESENT WESTMINSTER SYSTEM IS CURRENTLY DRAWING UP A BLUEPRINT FOR A RESTRUCTURING OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COUNTRY IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE, AT LEAST INDIRECTLY, COLORED AND INDIAN POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS. CURRENT GOVERNMENT THINKING IS TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE PARTY PROVINCIAL CONGRESSES IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER TO GAIN RANK AND FILE SUPPORT. THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE TO SUBMIT THE PROPOSALS, IN THE FORM OF CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, TO PARLIAMENT NEXT JANUARY. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING THE TWO-THIRDS VOTE NECESSARY TO ENACT THEIR REFORMS WITH NO SIGNIFICANT ALTERATION. THE EMBASSY WILL BE REPORTING SEPARATELY ON THE LIKELY NATURE OF

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THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES THE NP HAS IN MIND AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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